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INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 9185
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RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 0162
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 3104
RUEHGZ/AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU 0251
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 0617
RUEHGH/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 2559
RUEHSH/AMCONSUL SHENYANG 7052
RHHJJAA/JICPAC HONOLULU HI
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 000589

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2019

TAGS: PGOV TW

SUBJECT: DPP AND PRO-GREEN GROUPS PLAN MAY 17 RALLY AGAINST
PRESIDENT MA

REF: A. REF A. TAIPEI 1569
 1B. REF B. TAIPEI 529
 1C. REF C. TAIPEI 571

Classified By: AIT Director Stephen M. Young,
Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

11. (SBU) Summary: The DPP and pro-Green organizations are gearing up for demonstrations in Taipei and Kaohsiung on Sunday, May 17, timed to coincide approximately with President Ma Ying-jeou's first anniversary in office (May 20). After the demonstration in Taipei in front of the Presidential Office concludes at 10:00 p.m., the DPP will stage a 24-hour sit-in to protest planned amendments to the parade and assembly law. The party is refusing to apply for a permit for the sit-in, but the city government has said it will take a low-key approach to the event. The demonstrations may attract large crowds, which would provide a needed boost to the demoralized DPP. End Summary.

DPP Demonstration in Taipei

12. (C) This Sunday (May 17), the DPP will hold a major protest march and rally in Taipei, its first street demonstration since last November. Then, protests against visiting PRC Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Strait (ARATS) Chairman Chen Yunlin resulted in a number of confrontations with the police (ref A). Sunday also will be the fourth time opposition supporters have gathered en masse to protest the actions and policies of President Ma Ying-jeou since he took office on May 20, 2008. DPP Chair Tsai Ing-wen and party International Affairs Director Bikhim Hsiao have told AIT repeatedly that party supporters are eager to return to the streets to voice dissatisfaction with Ma and his administration. Sunday is their chance.

13. (C) The DPP wants to mobilize 100,000 supporters for the Taipei demonstration and hopes that onlookers will swell the crowd to 200,000-300,000 or more. Participants will gather at four start points around Taipei at 2:00 p.m. and begin walking toward Ketagalan Boulevard in front of the Presidential Office at 3:00 p.m. Each group of marchers will have a different theme and be led by a senior party leader. 2008 DPP Presidential candidate Frank Hsieh will lead the "Save the Unemployed" group, while former Premier and VP candidate Su Tseng-chang will head the "Protect the Disadvantaged" contingent. Tsai Ing-wen will lead the

"Protect Taiwan" group, and former Vice President Annette Lu and former DPP Chairman Yu Shyi-kun will lead the "Protect Sovereignty" contingent. (Note: Yu Shyi-kun is also scheduled to participate in the Kaohsiung event, and it is not clear how he will divide his time between the two activities.) The marchers will converge at Ketagalan Boulevard, the most common site for political protests in Taipei. The rally, running from 5:00 to 10:00 p.m., will feature speakers and entertainers appearing on a stage set up in the street. The large crowd will likely spill over into nearby streets, which the police will block off to vehicle traffic.

¶14. (C) After the rally, the DPP plans a 24-hour silent sit-in at the same site to protest government-proposed changes to the parade and assembly law that the DPP deems too restrictive. The proposed amendments would allow police to restrict the location of rallies and to prevent or redirect demonstrations if they threaten national security, social order, or public interest, among other reasons. The DPP strongly objects to the proposed changes and has threatened disruptive actions if the KMT tries to push the bill through the Legislative Yuan. The KMT has decided to postpone legislative action until after Sunday's protest. Party Chair Tsai Ing-wen has ordered DPP officials to stay overnight for the sit-in and, as a protest, will not apply to the city government for permission to use the street.

Pro-Green Rally In Kaohsiung

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¶15. (C) While DPP headquarters is focusing its energies in Taipei, other pro-independence organizations such as Southern Taiwan Society will hold their own march and rally in Kaohsiung on Sunday. This march and rally could attract 100,000 to 200,000 people, predicted Taiwan Society Secretary-General and Dean of Soochow University's Political Science department Lo Chih-cheng to poloff during a May 12 meeting. As in Taipei, participants will march from meeting points toward a central rallying point, in Kaohsiung's main park. Lo noted that some participants will participate in the Kaohsiung event and then leave to join the overnight sit-in in Taipei.

¶16. (C) Although not DPP-organized, the Kaohsiung demonstration highlights mixed feelings within the party. Some DPP contacts have expressed concern that southern supporters will attend the Kaohsiung protest in lieu of traveling to Taipei, resulting in a less-impressive turnout. Others point out the benefits of having two separate events - one DPP-sponsored and one not - to show that concern about Ma's policies is not just a partisan political issue and to give DPP supporters in the island's south an opportunity to protest. Ironically, the DPP is having problems securing buses to transport supporters from southern Taiwan to Taipei, as many buses are booked to handle the growing influx of PRC tourists and a large KMT outing. One DPP legislator chartered a train to bring demonstrators to Taipei. A DPP Kaohsiung City official told AIT that the party's local office was unofficially encouraging supporters to attend the southern rally if they could not travel to Taipei.

¶17. (C) On the other hand, some are boycotting the Taipei rally to display their discontent with the party center and Tsai's leadership. Changhua County DPP leaders and other party supporters told AIT POL Chief during a May 14 meeting that they would all attend the Kaohsiung rally, to show their disappointment with the party and Tsai Ing-wen's leadership. They hoped the existence of the two separate demonstrations will highlight the dissatisfaction with Tsai and put "pressure on" her and DPP central headquarters, criticizing Tsai for keeping her distance from former President Chen Shui-bian and for her decisions on candidate nominations for the December local elections (ref B).

The Chen Factor And Other Observations

¶18. (C) Aside from the Kaohsiung rally, the DPP likely wishes it could avoid Chen Shui-bian's attempt to link himself to the demonstration. The detained Chen began a hunger strike on May 7, promising to remain on strike until May 17 to show his support for the rally (see ref C). Before starting his hunger strike, Chen complained of various ailments but refused to be examined. In the end, he was sent to the hospital May 9-12, where he was treated for dehydration. Chen reportedly is still staging his hunger strike but is drinking water. Both DPP's Yang Chang-chen and Taiwan Society's Lo Chih-cheng deemed Chen would not have much effect on the rallies. Perhaps in response to critics, Tsai Ing-wen, accompanied by former Premier and DPP Chairman Su Tseng-chang, visited Chen at the Detention Center May 14. Afterwards they signalled party unity should be the priority at this juncture.

¶19. (C) Lo also pointed out that a strong turnout (i.e., 300,000 participants) could give the DPP and Tsai a much-needed boost, particularly if things proceed peacefully. The key, Lo said, will be what the DPP does after the rally. It needs to maintain momentum, for example, by blocking the LY from amending the parade and assembly law - possibly literally, by staging sit-ins at the LY. Passage of the law would seriously harm the party's future attempts to protest, particularly during the next round of cross-Strait talks Taiwan is due to host in the fall. Lo also noted the DPP could try to appeal to broader segments of society instead of only its traditional supporters. Since August 2008, pro-Green rallies have attracted larger numbers of non-Green attendees, such as those who are dissatisfied with Ma and those who are unemployed. While he cautioned against

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automatically counting these demonstrators as Green supporters, Lo deemed there might be an opportunity for the DPP to try to serve their interests, for example, by finding employment solutions.

Comment

¶10. (C) This Sunday's demonstrations may expose more sharply the divisions within the broader Green camp, as well as within the DPP itself. More importantly, they are a key test for Tsai Ing-wen as she continues to try to strengthen the DPP. As the demonstrations will be the first large protests since those that turned violent in November, neither the DPP nor the police will be taking any chances. We expect the police to be out in full force, and the DPP leadership will do its part to try to ensure the rally remains peaceful.

Party members continue to maintain that infiltrators have in the past incited the crowds at Green rallies and could do so again. Another aspect that may be out of the party's control is the possibility that protesters will remain at the rally site to extend the duration of the demonstration. In the end, weather could be a factor, particularly for the 24 hour silent protest. There is a chance of showers on Sunday and rain is in the forecast for Monday, which could dampen turnout.

YOUNG